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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 007701

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [BEXP](#) [EAIR](#) [IN](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: HIGH LEVEL INDIAN REP FOR AFGHANISTAN INAUGURATION

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (U) Action request for OVP. Please see para 4.

2. (C) Reflecting significant Indian interests in Afghanistan and GOI support for Karzai's re-election, New Delhi has designated Minister of State in the PMO Prithviraj Chavan to lead the official delegation for the December 7 Afghan inauguration. As Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Chavan serves as a go-between for Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi, providing some of the political screen that Brajeh Mishra offered in the Vajpayee PMO. A founding member of the Indo-US Parliamentary Forum, Chavan is a US-educated contemporary of Rajiv Gandhi who was a supporter of our bilateral relationship long before it became fashionable.

3. (C) MEA contacts intimated several weeks ago that the timing of the Afghan inauguration, which coincides with a short and intensive session of Parliament, would complicate efforts to identify a suitably high-level leader of the Indian delegation. The decision to designate Chavan (who will be sent as a personal emissary of the Prime Minister) reflects a typically Indian effort to split the difference, while avoiding the political problems that could result if Foreign Minister Natwar Singh was out of the country while Parliament was in session.

4. (SBU) Action Request: As detailed septel, the GOI has just issued a Request for Proposal for 50 widebody aircraft for Air India. US success in this major tender will require sustained high-level advocacy to balance pressures from European capitals, including from Chancellor Schroeder PM Blair and President Chirac, all of whom have weighed in to support Airbus. In this context, Mission asks that OVP seek an opportunity for the Vice President to engage personally with Minister Chavan on behalf of Boeing. All indications are that this tender is on a fast track. The Vice-President's visit is an opportunity to convey a high level message that will go straight to the decision-making levels of the Indian government.

5. (U) Minimize considered.
MULFORD